

Forgiveness

Nina Chen, Ph.D.
Human Development Specialist

What is forgiveness? Webster's New World Dictionary defines "forgive" as "(1) to give up resentment against or the desire to punish; stop being angry with and (2) to give up all claim to punish . . .; (3) to cancel or remit (a debt)." Forgiveness is a process to help people release their pain and anger and feel stronger and less vulnerable to others.

Forgiveness is not forgetting or meaning you agree with what the other person did to you. Forgiveness means letting go of blame, hurt, and resentments. Forgiveness can break the cycle of hate and resentment and provide opportunities to bring peace of mind, joy, love, and positive outlooks. Forgiving someone or forgiving self gives people more time and energy to achieve their goals and help create harmony. Forgiveness also means that even if we cannot get along or love each other any more, we can forgive each other.

Forgiving someone can be good for your emotional, psychological, and physical well-being. Several studies have shown the benefits of forgiveness. For instance, forgiveness is linked to lower blood pressure, improved health, more life satisfaction, and less associated with anger and depression than people who have not forgiven.

You may ask yourself "I was hurt so deeply, how can I forgive my ex-spouse?" You may not forget your wounds, unfairness, or injustice, however, when you forgive, you will free yourself from the bondage of anger and the control of a painful past and feel relief to move forward to your future.

Forgiveness is not easy. Forgiveness is a choice. To forgive takes a decision, time, and effort. But if you don't forgive, you may always carry intense emotional pain, anger, burdens, resentment, and hurt in your life. If you want to move forward and for the sake of your children, it is critical to forgive and ask for forgiveness when you have offended your ex-spouse. Forgiveness can be a turning point in recovery from a divorce.

References:

Enright, R.D. (2001). *Forgiveness is a choice: A step by step process for resolving anger and restoring hope*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Divorce and Anger

Nina Chen, Ph.D.
Human Development Specialist

Anger is a natural human emotion. Everyone experiences anger from time to time. Anger can be a sign to tell us that something is not right that we need to take care of, protect from harm, or make a change. Anger also can be harmful to us and those around us. Our responses can turn into constructive or destructive behavior depending on how we deal with anger.

Going through a divorce can be painful with a lot of mixed emotions and feelings. Expressing anger in a constructive way helps you go through the healing process after your divorce and helps your children cope with parental divorce positively. It's important to identify and acknowledge your anger triggers and learn how to handle them. If you don't manage anger constructively or you remain angry long-term, you may feel unhappy, helpless, bitter, lonely, and hopeless. It may drive you crazy and become a barrier for you to move forward

If you have a hard time letting go of anger, you might think about how your children might be affected by your anger. When anger, fighting, and conflicts continue even after the divorce, negative effects will be shown in children's behavior and they may remain wounded psychologically.

Tips on Dealing with Divorce Anger

Nina Chen, Ph.D.
Human Development Specialist

- Identify your anger triggers and ask yourself what makes you angry, why you feel this way, and how you can respond differently.
- Stop and think before you respond or act.
- Stay calm and explore ways to solve problems.
- Keep your children out of conflicts and avoid putting your children in the middle.
- Discuss one issue at a time and let the small issues go.
- Avoid taking your ex-spouse's statements personally. Listen to your ex-spouse's point of view with an open mind. Respect your ex-spouse's right to have a different opinion. Treat your ex-spouse as a business partner.
- Explain how you feel without blaming your ex-spouse.
- Praise more than criticize.
- Forgive, let go, and move on.

If you are extremely angry . . .

- Take a deep breath, count to 10.
- Splash water on your face, or take a walk.
- Shout it out when you are the only one who can hear it.
- Take a time out from the place of tension until you cool off. (If you are watching your children, make sure they are safe).
- Write in a journal or on a sheet of paper to express your feelings.
- Talk with someone who you trust.

Question and Answer

Q. How can I help myself go through divorce?

A. Divorce is a big loss and can be painful to go through. You need to take time to think about your future, goals, resources, and how you can take control of your life. Doing regular exercises, having enough sleep, eating healthy, talking with trusted friends or family members, joining a support group, scheduling fun time with your children, exploring things you enjoy doing, and forgiving yourself or your ex-spouse can help you rebuild your confidence, hope, and self-esteem and move forward to your future.

Holidays after Divorce

Nina Chen, Ph.D.
Human Development Specialist

Holidays after divorce can be difficult, stressful, and challenging for parents and children to face. Holidays may bring some old memories that can even make everyone feel hurt, sad, angry, disappointed, and mixed emotions. When parents divorce, everyone in the family needs to make adjustments at holidays. Whether children will adjust well or not to the holiday visitation schedule depends on how well their parents adjust to their new roles. In order to make the best of holiday seasons for their children and themselves, both parents need to plan ahead to avoid scheduling conflicts, arguments, or misunderstandings.

The following are some suggestions to help establish lasting memories for your children and yourself:

- Make detailed plans to avoid confusion and help both parents and children know what to expect. Make sure your children know where they will be spending the holiday. If changes need to be made, discuss with the other parent early.
- Create holiday traditions with your children. If children are not with you for a holiday, find positive ways to enjoy the holiday for yourself.
- Avoid using holidays to compete with the other parent. Focus on your children's needs and set realistic expectations.
- Teach your children the meaning of holidays and giving and sharing. Buying expensive gifts is not a way to get your children's love. The best gifts children need from parents are time, attention, unconditional love, and emotional presence.
- Communicate with the other parent openly. Work with him or her to decide who will take the children on which holiday well in advance. If you have more than two children, don't split them up. Let them be together which can help them feel secure and connected.
- Be aware of your children's feelings and encourage them to express and talk about their feelings..
- Take care of yourself emotionally and physically. You need to develop a good support system and put your past behind to be able to have joyful and fulfilling holidays.

Best wishes for a joyful and peaceful holiday season!

Spending a Holiday Alone

Nina Chen, Ph.D.
Human Development Specialist

If your children are with the other parent for a holiday, it can be devastating for you to be alone and separated from your children for the first time. Being single again without children around to adjust to the holidays can also be stressful. Planning ahead can help you decide what you really want to do for a holiday without your children. If you wait till the last minute to plan, you may have a hard time enjoying a meaningful holiday unless you prefer to be alone.

Check around your community calendars to see if there are special holiday events that you might be interested in. You need to make an effort to get involved. For instance get involved in church projects or community events, get together with friends, volunteer to help others, visit a place that you have dreamed of for a long time, take a trip, and so on.

If you still have a lot of time alone, find things that can make you feel happy, relaxed, and peaceful. For example, listen to music, do your house project or hobbies, take a walk, read a book that you enjoy, watch a movie, start a craft project and new hobby, cook a special holiday meal, do relaxation exercises, etc. Take positive approaches and enjoy the special time for yourself.

Tips on Spending Holiday with Children

Nina Chen, Ph.D.
Human Development Specialist

- Plan ahead. Think about what are things that your children would enjoy doing together during a holiday. Have a family meeting to discuss a holiday plan and let them be involved in the plan. Making a holiday plan together helps children feel confident, secure, and loved. Be creative, open, and flexible to establish traditions with your children.
- Provide routine schedules. Children need consistent schedules even in a holiday season. If it is impossible to keep a routine schedule during a holiday, tell your children the change and what to expect ahead of time. Don't schedule too many activities to overwhelm your children.
- Allow children to talk about past holidays and encourage them to express their feelings, memories, and joy.
- Keep a holiday simple and meaningful. For instance, have children help with decorations, making holiday meals, visiting extended families, etc. Help children find a church or community project that you all could do together to share the joy of holidays with people in homeless shelters, nursing homes, hospitals, or foster homes.
- Give your children reassurance. Children may feel guilty when they spend a holiday with only one parent. Help them make contacts with the other parent by phone, e-mail, cards, letters, etc.

Question and Answer

Q: My children worry about me when they spend a holiday with the other parent. What should I tell them?

A: Let your children know your plan such as what you will do and where you will be while they are gone. Assure them that you will be fine and enjoy the holiday.